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Volume 18, October 1996

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF REV. PROF. E. A. RUSSELL, B.A., B.D., M.Th. D.D. (PART III)

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THE CONTEMPORARY QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS¹

Dale C. Allison, Jr.

At the moment many voices are trying to tell who Jesus of Nazareth really was. For the first time in my memory even small local bookstores in the States feature several scholarly books on the historical Jesus. They are selling well. John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*² and Burton Mack's *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q*³ have together now sold somewhere in the neighbourhood of 125,000 copies. Those who have written academic books will know this is a very large number.

So many books claiming to unveil the real Jesus have appeared of late that some say we are seeing the third quest for the historical Jesus. The first quest was the nineteenth century German endeavour so memorably reported by Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.⁴ The second was the so-called new quest, inaugurated by Ernst Käsemann's famous 1953 lecture in Marburg and then carried on by some of Rudolf Bultmann's students.⁵ The third-- well, that is the subject of this lecture. I should like to offer some scattered observations about what is going on right now.

To begin with one should be unhappy with the typology which is quickly becoming the common wisdom: first quest, new quest, third quest.⁶ This triad raises at least two questions. First,

¹ This is an abbreviated version of the Alexander Robertson lecture, delivered in March of 1996 at the University of Glasgow. I have preserved the informality of the original address. It is reproduced here in honour of Professor Russell on his eightieth birthday.

² San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.

³ San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993

⁴ New York: Macmillan, 1961, trans. of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, 1906.

⁵ See 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus,' in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SBT 41 (London: SCM, 1964) pp. 15-47.

⁶ The typology appears to have been first used by N. T. Wright: see Stephen Neil and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (New York: Oxford, 1988), pp. 397-98.

what about the many who laboured between Schweitzer and Käsemann, that is, in the fifty year period between the so-called old quest and the so-called new quest? Secondly, what about those who wrote after Käsemann and before the so-called third quest but were not Bultmannians, not really new questers?⁷

Concern here is not unfounded. I recently read a book which, although it is all about the current quest for Jesus, opens by offering

See also Wright's article, 'Jesus, Quest for the Historical,' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, volume 3 H-J, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 796-802. Cf. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. ix ('A third quest is under way'); C.E. Braaten, 'Jesus and the Church: An Essay on Ecclesial Hermeneutics,' *Ex Audiu* 10 (1994), pp. 59-71; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 4; David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1995), pp.17, 21 ('We do believe that the extreme skepticism of some scholars .. has rightly been rejected by many recent scholars, including several of those in the so-called "third quest"').

⁷ Wright, 'Jesus, Quest for the Historical,' strangely locates his discussion of Joachim Jeremias, Edward Schillebeekx, the Jesus Seminar, Burton Mack and F. Gerald Downing under the heading of the new quest. This reveals the artificiality of the scheme. Jeremias who was already writing books and articles on Jesus in the 20s and 30s and 40s, is much more plausibly thought of as continuing the old quest than as taking up the new quest. And the relevant works of the Jesus Seminar, Mack, and Downing all appeared after the publication of the books that Wright assigns to the third quest (E.g. Ben F. Meyers, *the Aims of Jesus* (1979) and John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (1980). Obviously Wright's taxonomy is not chronological. It would indeed seem to follow, since the Jesus Seminar, Mack and Downing are still turning out works on Jesus, that the new quest is continuing at the same time as the third quest. Does this make sense? It is interesting that Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, p. 4 can declare that 'The Jesus Seminar thinks of itself as the vanguard of the "Third Quest"'

a history of what has gone on over the last two hundred years. The author reviews the first quest, the new quest, the third quest. What about the period between the first quest and the new quest? He calls this--as have some others recently--the period of no quest. He says that, between 1906 and 1953, a new-found awareness that Christians typically look down the well of history only to see their own reflected faces, combined with scepticism about Mark's historicity, the acids of form criticism, and a new theology which isolated faith from history, created "a period where the general optimism of discovering a relevant historical Jesus behind the portraits of the Gospels, an optimism which fuelled the 'Old Quest,' was lost."⁸ The author then moves on to the New Quest.

What does one say to this? The words are a fair generalisation about Bultmann and some of his students. But Bultmann did not rule the theological world, only parts of it. This was when C. H. Dodd and Vincent Taylor and T. W. Manson--all British questers--were living forces to be reckoned with, and when Joachim Jeremias was turning out study after study on the Jesus of history. Certainly scholars in the first half of our century did not share their predecessors' confidence in our ability to write full-bodied biographies of Jesus; and, just like the behaviourists of that time, who refrained from speaking of the consciousness of their subjects, many grew uneasy with talk about Jesus' so-called "messianic consciousness." There was further in many quarters--particularly German quarters--doubt as to the theological relevance of the historical Jesus. But many continued to quest nonetheless. Eight feet from my desk there is a little bookshelf whose occupants tell me that this was the time of Joseph Klausner's *Jesus: His Life, Times and Teaching* (1922), of A. C. Headlam's *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (1923), of Shirley Jackson Case's *Jesus: A New Biography* (1927), of T. W. Manson's *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931) and *The Sayings of Jesus* (1937/1949), of Rudolf Otto's *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (1934), of Martin Dibelius' *Jesus* (1939), of C. J. Cadoux's *The Historic Mission of Jesus*

⁸ Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton: Victor, 1995).

(1941), of William Manson's *Jesus the Messiah* (1943), and of R. H. Fuller's *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (1953).

Now these were not insignificant contributions. Everybody in my field read these books, whose authors were not second stringers on the sidelines of NT studies. No quest? Maybe reduced quest, but certainly not no quest. The time between Schweitzer and Käsemann was also when so many divinity students throughout Britain and North America were learning about Jesus from the first edition of A. M. Hunter's *The Work and Words of Jesus* (1950), a popular digest of the allegedly non-existent quest.

If the typology I am criticising falsely characterises the first half of the twentieth century and may mislead people into believing that during that period scholars did not produce instructive books on Jesus, it also distorts the facts for the period between 1950 and 1980, the latter being the date one chronicler gives for the approximate beginning of the so-called third quest.⁹ This is the period in which the new quest of Bultmann's students is located. But much else--I would say much else of more importance--must also be located here. Concurrent with and subsequent to the opening of the much ballyhooed but disappointing new quest, and preceding the so-called third quest, publishers gave us the following--again I just have to look at one of my own bookcases: Vincent Taylor's *The Life and Ministry of Jesus* (1954), Ethelbert Stauffer's *Jesus and His Story* (German edition, 1957), Morton Scott Enslin's *The Prophet from Nazareth* (1961), Otto Betz's *What Do We Know About Jesus?* (German edition, 1965), C. K. Barrett's *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (1967), Xavier Leon-Dufour's *The Gospels and the Jesus of History* (French edition, 1967), Norman Perrin's *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (1967), Eduard Schweizer's *Jesus* (German edition, 1968), C. H. Dodd's *The Founder of Christianity* (1970), Etienne Trocmé's *Jesus as seen by his Contemporaries* (French

⁹ cf. James H. Charlesworth, 'Christian Origins and Jesus Research,' in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring Jesus' Place in Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 78: 'Jesus Research' -- Charlesworth's name for what has gone on since the waning of the new quest -- 'commenced around 1980.'

edition, 1971), and Geza Vermes' *Jesus the Jew* (1973). The 1950's, 60's, and 70's also saw the publication of important New Testament Christologies which had much to say about Jesus--those of Oscar Cullmann (1957), Ferdinand Hahn (1963), and R. H. Fuller (1965) come to mind--as well as three significant German theologies of the New Testament which open with substantial accounts of the historical Jesus--those of Werner Kümmel (1969) and Leonard Goppelt (1975) and the unfinished work of Jeremias (1971). Gustav Aulén, writing in 1973, observed that "literature on Jesus is now experiencing prosperity."¹⁰ That was over twenty years ago, and almost a decade before some now tell us the third quest started.

Aulén was correct, and I have been scratching my head trying to figure out what is truly different about the last two or three decades. What is this so-called third quest? The attention to extra-canonical sources--so important for some current questers -- is no good reason for positing something new. For many contemporary questers--for example, E. P. Sanders and John Meier--stick to the canonical sources; and in any case the purported discovery of authentic sayings of Jesus in extra-biblical materials was long ago the subject of Jeremias' *Unknown Sayings of Jesus* (1951), and before that of Alfred Resch's massive 1906 tome, *Agrapha*. The struggle against apocalyptic eschatology, against the belief that Jesus thought the eschatological consummation to be at hand, a struggle which characterises the work of Crossan and Marcus Borg and Mack, is also nothing new. They have just taken the baton from earlier scholars such as C. H. Dodd and T. Francis Glasson and John A. T. Robinson. Nor can one find anything too much original in the way of method. N. T. Wright has indeed urged on the contrary that the third quest sets itself apart by an emphasis upon Jesus' Jewish context and Jewish character. But Rudolf Otto, William Manson, and Jeremias were all, in their own ways, trying to find Jesus by looking for Judaism. We may regard their use of Jewish sources as less sophisticated than our own; and we may see more continuity with Judaism whereas they saw less. And yet we continue to walk in the direction they were headed.

¹⁰ *Jesus in Contemporary Historical Research* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) -- trans of the 2nd Swedish edition, 1974.

Birger Pearson has offered that the alleged third quest is "distinguishable from the first two quests in claiming to lack *any* theological agenda."¹¹ One can concur that E. P. Sanders does not wear a theological agenda on his sleeve, but then he is in this respect hardly typical. Are we to say that Ben F. Meyer, A. E. Harvey, John Meier, N. T. Wright, and anyone else who does write with significant theological interest cannot be third questers? Moreover, one wonders how to classify participants who appear to have an anti-theological agenda. I shall return to the Jesus Seminar below, but here it may be noted that, in Pearson's words, this group is "driven by an ideology of secularisation, and a process of colouring the historical evidence to fit a secular ideal."¹² Theology is hardly the only ideological agenda one can bring to the task of interpreting Jesus. It may in fact be that none of us is altogether free of theological or anti-theological interests, so the presence or lack thereof seems a questionable criterion for classifying scholars who quest for Jesus.

Sometimes history naturally suggests we divide it in a particular way. Judaism was truly different after 70 C.E. than before, just as the American South was truly different after the Civil War than before. But sometimes the lines we write upon history for our own practical ends are misleading. One can, for instance, say that Gnosticism did not exist before Christianity because it was a Christian heresy; but this is an explanation which leaves too much unexplained.

Maybe the term, "third quest," is a phantasm conjured by a desire to bring order out of the chaos of our discipline. What if there is no convenient order to be discerned? What if our divisions between quests are lines drawn in the water? Blake says somewhere: "Education teaches straight lines but life is fuzzy." That there is indeed a contemporary quest for Jesus is manifest. That there is really much new about it is not. Certainly the current search is not a thing easily fenced off from its predecessors. It has no characteristic method. It has no body of shared conclusions. It has no common set of historiographical or theological presuppositions. And trying to

¹¹ 'The Gospel according to the Jesus Seminar,' *Religion* 25 (1995), p. 320.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 334.

locate its beginning is like trying to find the origins of modern science: the ever-present continuity with and debt to the past make convenient divisions into neat periods suspect.

One is not even sure the so-called third quest's volume of production means much. Books on Paul have also multiplied of late. So too have books on Hebrews. And books on James. There are just more NT scholars writing now than in the past; and there are more publishers and journals now than in the past; and so there are naturally more books and articles on Jesus now than in the past.¹³

One wonders: maybe the major difference between what is going on now and what went on earlier is that today--for whatever reason--books about Jesus get more popular publicity. Maybe the quest has changed less than its marketing.

II.

But with that let me pass on to a second topic, namely, human ignorance. One of the more troubling features of the current quest is that too few of us--I exclude E. P. Sanders and John P. Meier from the following generalisation¹⁴--too few of us want to say, we do not know. But sometimes--often times--we really do not know.

Consider Appendix I to John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*--a book whose dust jacket declares it to be "the first comprehensive determination of who Jesus was, what he did, what he said." While Crossan is not responsible for this outrageous blurb, we can hold him accountable for the appendix, which is entitled "An Inventory of the Jesus Tradition by Chronological Stratification and Independent Attestation." In this inventory Crossan breaks down the early traditions about Jesus into 522 units. These units in turn are classified as belonging to one of four strata. To the first stratum belong materials attested in sources dating from 30- 60 C.E.; to the second materials attested in sources dating from 60-80 C.E.; to the

¹³ Charlesworth, 'Christian Origins and Jesus Research,' pp. 82-83, fails to mention this crucial factor when trying to explain the recent 'explosion of interest' in the historical Jesus.

¹⁴ One of the great virtues of the books on Jesus by these two scholars is that they often declare inability to determine the origin of a saying or tradition.

third materials attested in sources dating from 80-120 C.E.; and to the fourth materials attested in sources dating from 120-150 C.E. Within each strata sayings are then classified into four additional categories depending upon whether they are independently attested in four or more sources, three sources, or two sources, or appear in only one source.

One problem with Crossan's inventory is that it might foster the illusion of scientific objectivity. The four periods--30-60 C.E., 60-80 C.E., 80-120 C.E., 120-150 C.E.--are in truth arbitrary. More importantly, the inventory presupposes all sorts of controversial judgements. The first stratum, for instance, includes what Crossan calls *Gospel of Thomas I*, his second stratum *Gospel of Thomas II*. Crossan believes that the extra-canonical *Gospel of Thomas*, discovered in Egypt in the 1940's, to be not only a first-century document independent of the canonical Gospels but the product of two distinct redactions which he can distinguish. Perhaps he is right. But those of us who would not wager much on the truth of his hypothesis--and that is what it is, a hypothesis-- will find his cataloguing system less than helpful.

But let me move on to the chief complaint. Each unit comes prefaced with a plus sign (+) or a negative sign (-). A plus sign means the unit or its core is from the historical Jesus. A negative sign means that the unit does not derive from Jesus himself but later Christian tradition. Is it not amazing that there are only plus signs and negative signs? Where are all the question marks? Sober reflection suggests there are limits to the powers of our historical-critical methods. Some things cannot be known. Surely Jesus said some of the things attributed to him. And surely Jesus did not say some of the things attributed to him. And just as surely there must be occasions on which we cannot tell the difference. Doubt must surround our historical conjectures as shadow does light. It is strange that Crossan, who is a sceptic about so much--including Jesus' apocalyptic orientation--is not more sceptical about his own ability to divine the past. Some of his incredulity should be self-directed. I would trust Crossan more if he would more often confess to be within the cloud of unknowing.

Crossan might respond that I have misinterpreted his negative sign. Maybe, he would say, it indicates only that a unit

cannot be safely attributed to Jesus, that it might come from Jesus but we just cannot know this. Crossan, however, does not say this. He says that a negative sign stands for his judgement that a unit does not come from the historical Jesus. Beyond this, many--not a few but many--of the units which carry the negative sign contradict, as Crossan himself freely confesses, his own reconstruction of the historical Jesus. So for him those units just cannot be authentic.

The subject of ignorance brings us to that other current book that has sold so well, Burton Mack's *The Lost Gospel*. This is a book all about Q, the hypothetical collection of sayings of Jesus used by both Matthew and Luke. In Mack's book this hypothetical document becomes a wrecking ball that again and again batters conventional reconstructions of Christian origins. Mack contends that Q has very little indeed to do with memories of the historical Jesus. It is rather a sourcebook for detectives interested in discovering, without benefit of Paul or Acts, the true history of earliest Christianity. Research into Q reveals that Q developed in stages, and that at the earliest stage Jesus was remembered as a enigmatic aphorist; only in later stages did he come to be dressed in the clothes of a Jewish prophet who spoke of things eschatological. The Jesus who stays hidden in the mists of Mack's history was a Jewish Cynic, a countercultural figure about whom we can know hardly anything. For apart from the early, non- eschatological phase of Q, its later phases evidently tell us nothing about this sage: they are for us only opportunities to offer hypothetical reconstructions of early Christian communities.

Mack's analysis of Q moreover reveals that the first followers of Jesus did not confess him to be the Jewish Messiah, did not believe that he rose from the dead, did not think the last days were to hand. Not that the alleged first Q explicitly rejects these things: it just does not mention them. Like Sherlock Holmes, who noticed that the dog did not bark in the night-time, Mack finds great meaning in silence.

Mack, however, is no Sherlock Holmes. Nor is his work likely to be the revolutionary contribution which the jacket blurbs make it out to be but--I shall be candid instead of generous--rather just one more example of how one can drift anywhere with an

unanchored imagination.¹⁵ Mack--like Crossan--is a victim of the all-too-human desire to know what cannot be known. I certainly share Mack's belief in Q; moreover, in a forthcoming publication I have myself sought to unravel its compositional history. Nonetheless, we really cannot go behind a hypothetical document and reconstruct the hypothetical history and theological development of the hypothetical communities which produced it and then make all this the key to Christian origins. This is much too much.

Mack's book poses as a massive deduction from the evidence. But its true method is the unstated assumption that the mere possibility of imagining a series of historical sequences is reason enough for believing that such a series in fact occurred. The improbability of the various propositions can be detected not by contrary evidence--they are not subject to falsification--but by a lack of evidence. And the feebleness of the hypothetical constructs is only hidden by their multiplicity. I am reminded of that infamous example of mixed metaphor: we have here shaky knees with feet of clay on thin ice.¹⁶ Now Mack may serve a purpose, for he causes us to re-examine so much we take for granted. But his habit of turning things on their head in order to make them stand on their feet probably tells us more about his personality than about ancient Christianity. Given that his arguments are all, in the end, about silence, the book is much too loud. Sometimes we should not forsake the tedium of the familiar.

Both Crossan and Mack want to know too much. The same is true of the so-called Jesus Seminar, that scholarly collectivity--made up mostly of North American academics--which from time to time gets together to vote on the authenticity of the Jesus tradition. They recently published the results of their voting on the sayings of Jesus. In my country all the bookstores right now carry *The Five Gospels*--a four-colour edition of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the non-canonical *Gospel of Thomas*. If a saying is in red then Jesus said it. If it is in pink then it sort of sounds like him. If it is in grey then he probably said no such thing. If it is in black then he certainly

¹⁵ cf. Pearson, 'Jesus Seminar,' p. 337: Mack offers an example of 'imagination run amok.'

¹⁶ Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, p. 53 speaks of 'pure flimflam.'

said no such thing. The future will see their book on the stories about Jesus.

There are several serious problems with the Jesus Seminar, whose method gives the illusion that some sort of consensus has been produced. In the first place a real consensus might be a dangerous thing, for it could encourage uncritical acceptance of positions that should always be re-examined: not everything that is, is right. Beyond that, what exactly can consensus--a statistical concept--mean in this context? Whose opinions should be registered? And how exactly should we register them? Should all New Testament scholars--maybe professors with Ph.D.'s?--be given votes? or only those who have written books and articles on the Gospels? or only those whose books and articles have had to do with the historical Jesus? And would those books and articles--in what languages?--need to have been published in the last twenty years or the last five years? And should it be one person, one vote; or should we have power rankings, as in tennis, so that the votes of acknowledged experts carry more weight than the votes of recent graduate students? (A healthy number of Jesus Seminararians are on any account novices.) Should a so-called consensus be obtained by granting to some seminar or study group the status of an electoral college? But who then elects the electoral college, and how? Surely they should not be self-elected, as the Jesus Seminararians are, should they? And how much time should pass between voting sessions, so that our historical Jesus does not go out of date? Perhaps some words of Oscar Cullmann that come to my mind are here relevant:

Despite the advantages of any working partnership, I do not regard collective thinking, as it is expressed in fashions and their corresponding slogans, as a good thing in our theological enterprise. In this case the general discussion gets bogged down within narrowly confined circles of thinking instead of leading to a deeper level, often becoming a monotonous, collective monologue without any real encounter, and leaving no room for raising new and individual questions.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Salvation in History* (London: SCM, 1967) p. 13.

But let us come to the real problem. The Jesus Seminar colours red only one sentence in the entirety of Mark, that is, regards as from Jesus only a single line--one which, incredibly enough, sounds like Paul in Romans 13 and so fails to satisfy the Seminar's criterion of dissimilarity: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." This sceptical result, this disintegration of the synoptic Jesus, condemns the whole enterprise. If our earliest Gospel is really so thoroughly a post-Easter document then, quite simply, the Gospels have given up the ghost of the historical Jesus and the quest is over. It is time to confess our ignorance and move on to other pursuits. If our sources are no better than the Jesus Seminar imagines, then let us admit that a history lost cannot be found. Let us have the courage to say plainly that our sources have failed us and the good judgement to refrain from offering in their place our own tales. Once we have eviscerated our sources we should have the decency to let the remains rest in peace--by which I mean we ought to have the sense to quit questing. The Jesus Seminar, however, instead of doing what for them would be the wise thing, namely, admitting defeat and going home, has instead told their own tale: they have discovered that Jesus was a non-eschatological sage and humanitarian rather unlike the eschatological prophet of the synoptics who recurrently warns of eschatological judgement. Thus they urge that Jesus never said, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out," for, in the words of their book, *The Five Gospels*, "the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar do not think such wholesale condemnations . . . typical of Jesus."

III.

After reviewing the nineteenth century's quest Albert Schweitzer contended that the honest scholar must travel one of two roads: thoroughgoing scepticism or thoroughgoing eschatology. The historical Jesus of future criticism, he wrote, "will be a Jesus, who was Messiah, and lived as such, either on the ground of a literary fiction of the earliest Evangelist, or on the ground of a purely

eschatological Messianic conception."¹⁸ By this Schweitzer meant that if Jesus did not live with the conviction that God was about to fulfil His promises to Israel, then the synoptics are so unreliable that about Jesus we know next to nothing. Either, as the synoptics indicate, Jesus' teaching was suffused with eschatology, or our sources are so misleading that we just cannot say much about Jesus.

Now there is much in Schweitzer with which to disagree, and sometimes antitheses are artificial. But this antithesis is not. We face Schweitzer's decision. If the SYNOPTICS give us some idea of what Jesus was all about then he was all about eschatology--about tribulation and vindication, about punishment and reward, about judgement and resurrection. The synoptics are full of eschatological materials. There are the sayings about the coming Son of man. There are the sayings about the coming kingdom of God. There is Mark 13, a lengthy prophecy of the latter days. There is Luke 17, Q's depiction of eschatological catastrophe. There are the prophetic woes cast upon those who reject Jesus' mission. There are the promises of eschatological comfort for the poor and the hungry. Again, if the synoptics have anything much to tell us much about Jesus, then he must have been all about eschatology.

If, however, Jesus was not all about eschatology then the synoptics are so unreliable that the game is up and--well, then, Jesus could have been about almost anything. Once we induce that the synoptics are in such a fundamental thing as eschatology a repository of post-Easter materials significantly incongruent with what Jesus had to say, then we are free to tell a hundred different stories.

Let me put it this way. If the synoptics may be likened to a tree, questers certainly must do a lot of trimming. Once they chop down the tree, however--and the Jesus Seminar has chopped it down--they cannot put it back up. They can only plant a new tree. Thus S. G. F. Brandon gave us Jesus the anti-Roman zealot. Morton Smith gave us Jesus the magician. Burton Mack has now given us Jesus the Jewish Cynic. Obviously we can, once the old is cleared away, plant almost anything.

Let me try another analogy. My children play with jigsaw puzzles. Sometimes they begin by putting together a picture by

collecting all the pieces with straight edges and then making the frame. Other times they will start with all the pieces of the same colour, put them together to make a portion of the whole, and then work outward. Once the picture is done one cannot tell which method they used. A completed jigsaw puzzle leaves no clues as to the order in which its pieces were assembled. Although we are reluctant to admit it, maybe the Jesus tradition is similar. We have the finished Gospels; but can we really draw up in any reliable detail, as Crossan has attempted to do, the multitudinous tradition histories that presumably lie behind them?

Writing a commentary on Matthew has given me the opportunity to review the sundry tradition histories that have been offered by divers scholars for all the material in the First Gospel; and I have often offered my own little speculative histories. But as my experience has grown my ambition has narrowed. The overwhelming impression one has after studying the vast secondary literature is that all too often we have been trying to know the unknowable. There is here so much disagreement that honesty counsels maybe we are frequently not doing history but rather just giving our imaginations a healthy work out. Maybe Mt 5:17, a saying which pledges faithfulness to Moses--"I came not to abolish the law and the prophets"--came first and the more radical statements about the law came later. Or maybe it was the other way round. Or maybe to a first-century Mediterranean Jewish peasant there was no contradiction. Who *really* knows? Maybe--as many think--Jesus made himself out to be Daniel's eschatological Son of man; or maybe--as many think--the church did this for him. One can tell either story. And both have been told. One can put together the many pieces of the synoptic puzzle in just about any order. And our sources, being inanimate, cannot protest.

Our ability to envisage so many different primal layers for the Jesus tradition, that is, so many different portraits of the historical Jesus, is worrisome in part because the temptation to make Jesus in our own image, after our likeness, is ever present. Schweitzer's great lesson, that we all find in the synoptic kaleidoscope the pattern we like best, is so difficult to learn, or rather to put into practice. Is it just happy coincidence that the Jesus Seminarians have excised from the authentic Jesus tradition just

about everything--including all dogmatism, all eschatology, and all Christology--that might remind them of American fundamentalist Christianity? Surely this result is too good to be true.

Helmut Koester, referring not to orthodox Christians but to moderns who still wish to have Jesus on their side, recently observed: "We are again on the way toward a human Jesus who is just like one of us, one who holds values that are very close to our ideological commitments, a Jesus who is a social reformer and who attacks patriarchal orders, a Jesus who, as a real human person, can stand as an example and inspiration for worthy causes."¹⁹

To aid us in making the currently fashionable non-eschatological social reformer and enigmatic sage, the post-Easter period remains a convenient trash can in which to throw everything that seems of no good use. Crossan and Mack, who give us such a Jesus, protect him by assigning very large loads of uncongenial eschatological elements to the evangelists and their predecessors. They assume, what Robert Funk, writing on behalf of the Jesus Seminar, has confidently affirmed, namely, that "Jesus' followers did not grasp the subtleties of his position and reverted, once Jesus was not there to remind them, to the [apocalyptic] view that they had learned from John the Baptist."²⁰

But there is nothing new under the sun. The avant guard of modern scholarship is, in its own way, just rerunning an old apologetical movie: we have seen this one before. C. H. Dodd, in trying to save Jesus from Schweitzer's brand of eschatology, wrote that Jesus' reporters, "understandably anxious to find his words relevant to their own urgent preoccupations, have given them a twist away from their original intention."²¹ This strategy was also that of Ethelbert Stauffer, who claimed the disciples did not understand Jesus' message because they "were wholly children of their time,

¹⁹ 'Jesus the Victim,' *JBL* 111 (1992) p. 7.

²⁰ This quotation is from the introduction to R. W. Funk et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*. (New York: Macmillan, 1993)

²¹ *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 123.

furiously tossed upon the waves of Jewish political and apocalyptic messianism.”²²

This sort of apology against eschatological error has a long pedigree. It indeed already appears in the New Testament itself. Luke tells us that as Jesus went up to Jerusalem he told his disciples a parable, “because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” (19:11). Luke, like Dodd and Stauffer, is telling us that while the disciples got it wrong, Jesus got it right: he made no mistake; he was just misunderstood.

Now of course great figures who stand above their times can be misunderstood. I recently finished a book which tried to make the intriguing case that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* was quite misunderstood by absolutely everyone, including Wittgenstein’s close friends and associates²³. However that may be, with regard to Jesus we are dealing with fragmentary sources from 2,000 years ago. Is it not rather far-fetched to think we can stick our hands beneath truly misleading documents and pull up the truth? I remember what Nils Dahl wrote: “In no case can any distinct and sharp separation be achieved between genuine words of Jesus and the constructions of the community. We do not escape the fact that we know Jesus only as the disciples remembered him. Whoever thinks that the disciples completely misunderstood their Master or even consciously falsified his picture may give phantasy free reign.”²⁴ In other words, once we erase the slate, we are free to write our own sentences.

Sometimes maybe we are like the London police who pried open Annie Chapman’s dead eyes in the vain hope that her retinas might have retained an image of the last thing Annie saw, namely, Jack the Ripper. Loathing the possibility of leaving our case unsolved, we look for the clues to Jesus’ identity in very strange places. The passion to find our man overcomes good sense, so that we search for Jesus in, for instance, a hypothetical first Q, or a

²² *Jesus and His Story* (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 156-57.

²³ R. Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language* (Albany: SUNY, 1987).

²⁴ *The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974) p. 67.

hypothetical first *Gospel of Thomas*. But Scotland Yard never caught Jack. And the historical Jesus cannot be caught either—at least if we are left only to our own historical-critical devices. We also need the co-operation of our sources. The synoptics—I exclude John—need to be helpful sources or we are out of luck. If the sayings in the synoptics, taken in their entirety, are not roughly congruent with the sorts of things Jesus tended to say, and if the stories of his deeds do not give us a fair sense of the sorts of things people customarily perceived him to do, then what chance have we of saying much interesting about Jesus? Does it really make sense that those who find our sources so vague of memory still manage to produce yet more books about Jesus? One cannot solve a case without some decent witnesses.

This is not apologetics but rather the historian's recognition that if the sources have let us down too much then we have been let down utterly; and we cannot, try as we might, make up the lack. Our attempts in such a case will produce not history but historical fiction.

IV.

One guesses that we look for assistance from the *Gospel of Thomas* and seek to tell the story of the groups behind Q not only because we dislike ignorance but also because our minds are restless for new thoughts, for new discoveries. But if that is so, we can invigorate our discipline, that is, fight our boredom, in more profitable ways. Our time has seen the discovery of an incredibly valuable hoard of ancient documents which indirectly illumine the Gospels and so the historical Jesus. I refer of course to the Dead Sea Scrolls. For many years much of the material remained shut up under a bushel; but it has now seen the light of day, and blessed are our eyes, for many scholars have longed to see what we see, and did not see it. How strange and ironic that precisely at this point in time some are happily heralding the death of traditional historical-critical methods. Nothing else will enable us to sort through the chaos of these amazing documents. And such sorting will, by instructing us much about ancient Judaism, also instruct us about Christian origins and Jesus.

Let me illustrate by calling your attention to just one text, the recently released, fragmentary 4Q521, also known as 4QMessianic Apocalypse. It reads as follows:

[for the heav]ens and the earth will obey his Messiah, [and all] that is in them will not turn away from the holy precepts. . . . The Lord will observe the devout, and call the just by name, and his Spirit will hover over the poor, and the faithful he will renew with his strength. For he will honour the devout upon the throne of eternal royalty, freeing prisoners, giving sight to the blind, straightening out the twisted. . . . And the Lord will perform marvellous acts such as have not existed, just as he sa[id] for he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live, he will proclaim good news to the meek, give lavishly to the needy, lead the exiled and enrich the hungry

Let me suggest the relevance of these lines for the study of Jesus and the Gospels by asking a series of questions. Because heaven as well as earth obeys the Messiah is he a transcendent figure who perhaps has authority even over the angels? That is, do we have here a Jewish Messiah whose status approaches the exalted status of Jesus in the Gospels? Does 4Q521 not remind us of Mt 28.18, where Jesus declares, "all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me"? Is it more than coincidence that our text not only draws words and phrases from Isaiah 61:1 but also speaks of the eschatological enrichment of the hungry and that the four beatitudes in Q's sermon on the plain do exactly the same thing? When one adds that the allusions to Isaiah 61 in 4Q521 are also accompanied by references to miraculous healings and the resurrection of the dead, just as Jesus' answer to John the Baptist in Mt 11:5--another Q text--similarly joins allusions to Isaiah 61 with references to miraculous healings and the resurrection of the dead, do we have enough to postulate that Jesus or a contributor to Q actually knew 4Q521? Or should we infer that the Q text reflects a traditional exegesis of Isaiah 61? If in 4Q521 the miracles which the Lord performs, including healing the blind and preaching to the poor, are done through his anointed one--

John Collins has argued for this²⁵--do we have here evidence that some pre-Christian Jews expected a wonder-working Messiah or eschatological prophet, so that we can better understand why Jesus the wonder-worker excited messianic expectation, and better understand why the Gospels associate the title, "Son of David," with Jesus' healing of blind people? Again, if in 4Q521 the miracles which the Lord performs are done through an anointed one, might not this help us understand why the synoptic Jesus, who asks people not to reveal his identity as Messiah, also asks them not to speak about his miracles? Finally, in the light of 4Q521, if one were to judge that the little catalogue of deeds in Mt 11:5 goes back to Jesus--something even Bultmann thought--what would this say about Jesus' self-conception? Would it imply that he thought of himself as the central figure in his own eschatological scenario? Obviously the Scrolls give us more than enough to think about.

V.

But I have gone on long enough. It is time to conclude. Of the making of many books about Jesus there is no end. Speaking for myself, I do not find study of them a weariness of the flesh. It is, however, disconcerting that there are almost as many candidates for the historical Jesus as there are Christs of faith. To confuse the issue further we have three synoptics with their three different pictures of Jesus: they too disagree about things. So here, as so often in modern life, we are in a cafeteria of choices. We must decide. How then shall we decide wisely? There is no simple answer, and we should not pretend otherwise. It is hard to find the past, and much of it cannot be found. One can, however, recalling Schweitzer's famous but now insufficiently heeded dichotomy, say this much: the Jesus of Matthew and the Jesus of Mark and the Jesus of Luke do closely resemble one another. Indeed, they share a distinct set of family resemblances--including a very strong eschatological orientation. This orientation runs throughout the tradition, so that those who distrust that tradition as much as the Jesus Seminar do should not tell us that Jesus was not an eschatological prophet; rather should they allow that the

²⁵ 'The Works of the Messiah.' *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1 (1993), pp. 1-15.

tradition is so corrupt that nothing much can be said: they should become in this matter agnostics. But those of us who can believe that the synoptics are at least as much a help as a hindrance in our quest, must judge that the historical Jesus was, despite the current trend to deny this, all about eschatology.

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CHRISTIANITY AND CLASSICAL CULTURE

Rev. Prof. R. Buick Knox

Jesus Christ was born into the Jewish race and was reared in the faith and traditions of the Jewish people. He saw his own mission as the fulfilment of the hopes and promises set forth in the Old Testament. He spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew. There is a Jewish background in all his teaching.

His first disciples were Jews. However, if they were to obey the command to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, they would have to express it in a way capable of being grasped by people speaking different languages and having their own customs and culture.

Many Jews had left their homeland and settled abroad. Wherever they were, they were looked upon as a distinct people with their own customs and beliefs. Yet, even they were not immune from outside influences. Their Scriptures were translated into Greek, the version now known as the Septuagint. Witness also the work of Philo, a devout Alexandrian Jew who held that the teaching of Moses anticipated that of the Greek philosophers.

When Christians sought to plant their message in distant places, they were usually treated with suspicion by both native and Jewish people.

Strangely enough, in spite of their Jewish background, their main record of the life and teaching of Jesus in the New Testament was not written in Hebrew or Aramaic but in Greek, in the common form of that language spoken across the Roman Empire. Paul was the most notable figure in the move of the Faith out of its Jewish environment into the world of Hellenism. He spoke Hebrew and was trained in the most exclusive Hebrew schools, but, being brought up in Tarsus, he knew Greek, spoke it and used it for his letters. He used that language to express the Old Testament ideas of Covenant, Sacrifice and Blood. When he moved to Athens, he encountered many who were steeped in the ideas of the philosophical schools and he spoke so as to challenge them to see that what was of value in their thought found its corrective and completion in Christ; that involved a transformation in their idea of God, repentance from sin and a new obedience. The Gospel shed a new and incomparable light

upon the reality of God, Creator and Saviour, and upon the meaning of human life. (Acts, 17)

The Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews also show how ideas from Greek thought were early used to bring home the meaning of the Gospel. The use of the word 'Logos' - the Word - and the contrast between the temporal and the eternal had echoes from Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato.

As time went on and Christianity took root in the Gentile world, more and more ideas from Greek and Latin thought were used to express the Gospel. This raised problems within the Christian community. Was the use of these ideas likely to distort the original message of Jesus and the early teaching of the Church as seen in the New Testament? Early apologists for the Faith were ready to admit the dangers. There were groups who stressed the idea of attaining the knowledge of God, 'Gnosis'; they held this was attainable by only a few souls. They also wove around this idea a web of ideas from cults with no Christian connection. These Gnostics had to be resisted.

Nevertheless, the Apologists who challenged this deadly heresy also claimed that the Greek ideas were of use in making the Christian message intelligible in its new environment. It helped to clarify the Church's basic teaching on God, Creation and human life and destiny.¹

Justin Martyr held that the heritage of Mediterranean thought included much which pointed to the knowledge of God who was not limited to work through the Jewish story, but, though it was an anticipation of much of Christ's teaching, it was not a substitute for it. That teaching was based upon the Scripture which was the measure by which all else was judged.²

Irenaeus, a doughty warrior against the Gnostics, was also well aware how much the Greek thought was influencing the Church, especially in the use of the 'Logos' theme, but he held that the test of

¹ For a study of the Apologists and their attitude to Greek Theology, see Norris, R.A. *God and the World in Early Christian Theology*, (London, 1966).

² Norris, *op. cit.*, 44.

all teaching must be faithfulness to Scripture and to the Church's public Rule of Faith.³

Tertullian who was a pioneer in the use of Latin to defend the Faith and in the use of the word 'Trinity' to expound the nature of God, was also strongly critical of Greek philosophy which he held was far too attuned to polytheistic practices and produced 'patriarchs of heresy'. Yet he was not against giving some credit to Greek philosophy. It had true but inadequate knowledge of God derived from the order and beauty of the cosmos and also from the natural readiness of the soul to acknowledge the existence of a controlling deity. All ideas must be tested by reference to the Scriptures and the Church's Rule of Faith; in these, there is clear teaching on who God is, what he has done, is doing and will do in the world. The world is the sphere of human action and has a flow of events leading to the final judgement. Each person is responsible for his or her life in this world. In Tertullian's teaching, the central issue is the will of God and human obedience to it. With this practical emphasis, he was somewhat removed from the Greek idea of a quest for the knowledge of God. For him, God had revealed what was needful for us to know of him and his will. In his view, Greek theology, in so far as it is true, says what Scripture says.⁴

The Greek method of a quest for the knowledge of God had its most notable Christian advocate in Origen of Alexandria. He held that there was a natural knowledge of God and of moral principles in every person. Paul also taught this but he held it was so clouded and distorted by human limitations and sins that only a divine revelation could make it known; human attempts to discover God produced an intellectual pride and practical disobedience to God's will (Rom. 1).

Origen nevertheless esteemed the methods of Greek teaching as a tool to unravel the revelation of God given in the Bible. He himself was a fine, probably the finest, biblical scholar in his time. Witness his edition of various editions of the Old Testament, a resource still used by biblical scholars. He also received the inherited teaching of the Church as a reliable guide to the basic principles of the Faith.

³ Ibid, 67

⁴ Ibid, 83-102

He was much absorbed in the Greek contrast between the temporal and the eternal; this led him to believe that in the New Testament it was necessary to discover the Eternal Word hidden within the written words. This gave scope for the discovery of hidden allegorical meanings. Origen's fertile mind threw out suggestions which stimulated and disturbed the Church. From his Greek background he absorbed the idea of God as transcending all our thought but we know enough to see him as reality, truth and goodness, a goodness which expresses itself in what he creates: the creation is not evil and therefore evil comes from people's will.⁵

Some of his ideas were influential in the fourth-century debates on the Person of Christ. It is probable that he influenced Arius who held that Jesus Christ was a created being, neither fully divine nor truly human, and was subordinate to the Father. This novel teaching was challenged by Athanasius; he championed the teaching that Jesus was the eternal Son of God, fully human and fully divine. It was only because he was both divine and human that he was able to redeem lost mankind. The issue was debated at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The Emperor Constantine exerted heavy pressure to urge the assembled bishops to reach an agreement. The teaching of Arius was condemned and a definition was worked out stating that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was 'of the substance of the Father, God of God' and for 'our salvation came down and was made flesh and was made man'.

Though this definition owed much to Greek terminology, it is important to note, as Prof. Richard Hanson often pointed out, that all the controversialists were eager to support their cases by reference to the Scriptures which were the accepted regulative standard in the Church's life.⁶

Linguistic and political issues put a strain upon the definition of Nicea, but after more debates in many councils a further resolution of the issue was agreed at the Council of Constantinople in

⁵ Ibid, 107-139.

⁶ Hanson, R.P.C. Origen's Doctrine of Tradition (1954); *Allegory and Event* (1959); *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. (1990). For a review of this work, see my article in , *Irish Biblical Studies* Vol 12, April 1990, 86-94.

381 A.D. A revised form of the definition of Nicea was accepted and has come to be called the Nicene Creed. It became the accepted statement of the Faith throughout most of Christendom and has retained its position as the sound basis for a proper understanding of the teaching of the Bible. It proclaims that Jesus Christ is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, and for our salvation was made man. It also makes clear the Trinitarian position.

The main influences leading to this resolution were the great Cappadocian school of teachers. Their work has recently been analysed by the notable American church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan. His work, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, comprises his Gifford Lectures, 1992-93. The Cappadocians were steeped in their study of the Bible and the Faith, and also in the refinements of Greek language and thought. They were Gregory of Nyssa, a subtle, profound and clear thinker; his brother, Basil of Caesarea, a clear exponent of the place of the Holy Spirit in Christian teaching and also a devout and diligent organiser of the Church and its charitable outreach; their sister, Macrina, a competent and pioneering woman theologian and an organiser of educational and communal life on the family estates; there was also Gregory of Nazianzus, called to be bishop of Constantinople after a period when the churches in the city had been weakened by quarrels and who by his teaching and example did much to renew the vitality of the Church.⁷

The Cappadocians had a decisive influence in giving the Creed of Nicea its final form at Constantinople in 381. They had all been brought up within the Church and had accepted its Faith as their own. They held that the formulae of the Creed were necessary to give that Faith full definition, to keep it faithful to its teaching of the Bible and to preserve it from distortion by teachers prone to heresy.

They began from the common Faith that there was one God only, holy, righteous and merciful; he was the great Creator and had made himself known in creation and in Jesus Christ. So great and wonderful is God, there are no words adequate to describe him and to express the fullness of his being. Indeed, in attempts to describe him,

negative adjectives have to be used; he is immortal (not subject to death), invisible (not able to be seen), immutable (not subject to change). There are twenty-two letters in the Greek alphabet; the letter 'α' is often used as a negative when placed before an adjective to express that meaning. In Lampe's vast dictionary of the Greek words used by the Early Fathers one eighth of the work is devoted to the letter 'α' and many of these words are negative adjectives, many of them applicable to God. This usage has continued in English; for example, one of the most common hymns begins 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise' and in later verses describes God as 'unresting, unhasting'. Paul claimed to have been lifted up to heaven in a vision and he saw 'things which cannot be told' (2 Cor., 12:4). The Creeds state that God is the Father who has gone to great lengths for our salvation but he is also the Father Almighty to be approached with awe and humility.⁸

The knowledge of God is beyond all understanding, but not beyond a degree of understanding. Reason, said the Cappadocians, points us to see the greatness of his being, but the higher we lift our thoughts to the greatness of his being there is still a higher height to scale. There is no doubt that the heavens declare the glory of God, but not all the glory, for God is high above the heavens. (2 Chron. 6:18). It is possible to have some knowledge of the transcendent wisdom through the harmony of the cosmos. Gregory of Nyssa said there was a harmony which maintained the world in being; it was not the result of randomness. There was an inescapable contingency and unpredictability in the natural world and in human affairs. This was due to our partial knowledge. It was therefore proper to seek for further knowledge as far as it could be ascertained. Plato had already held that there was order in life and it was vain to think that order could flow from the capricious, amoral and inconsistent host of ancient gods. Plato's rather impersonal but important Idea of the Good points to the source from which all order flows. Moreover, the soul of man is akin to the world-order. This idea was also echoed in the teaching of Aristotle. It is also at the basis of all modern research, scientific, medical, historical and other varieties. There is the faith that the world will respond and reveal its

order to the searching mind. Gregory of Nyssa confidently declared, 'Investigate the work of nature'. He added that in this life we could never reach the full transcendent knowledge of God and his ways, but there was room for all efforts to trace those ways as far as our capacity allowed.⁹

Christians believe there is one God, one God only. He is the Father Almighty. There is therefore no ground for polytheism or atheism. Moreover, since he is the Creator and existed before creation, there is no ground for pantheism which identifies God with the creation. Further, since he is good, his creation is good. There is therefore no basis for dualism, the doctrine that there is a second, probably inferior God, who had a hand in the work of creation and injected into it features contrary to the intention of the sovereign God. This view has had a persisting plausibility throughout the centuries as an explanation of the evil, diseases and deformities which seem so contrary from what would be expected from the work of the one good Father. The New Testament has ample references to the Devil who goes about seeking whom he may devour. Christ spoke of 'the reign of darkness' (Luke 12:53); Paul referred to 'the God of this passing age' (2 Cor. 4:4); John referred to the prince of this world (John 14:30; 16:11). Yet, these evil powers have no place within God's ultimate plan. They are not sharers of his power. Paul says God must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet; he will destroy every rule, authority and power; God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28). It was therefore urgent that we do not remain entangled in the evils of this world and then be trampled underfoot in the judgement. God would not override human freewill and so there remained the possibility that some would persist in choosing evil and thus go into the fire of hell. However, both Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina stressed the hope that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil.2:10-11).¹⁰

Another favourite word used to describe God is that he is Light. Here again, we note the use of the negative adjectives to show how limited is our power to behold the divine light; God is

⁹ Ibid. 60-68.

¹⁰ Ibid. 80-96. 322-326.

unapproachable, ineffable light. We can only approach with reverence. Yet, such light as we have, the light of nature and of reason, point to the eternal light. Even more important is the fact that God had broken into our darkness in the gift of Jesus Christ. he is, as the Creed says, Light from Light, he is Light from God himself, the Light of the world; those who follow will know they are not walking in darkness but have the light of life; their own natural light will be given a new radiance and purity drawn from God himself (John 8:12).¹¹

Similarly, our space is limited, yet points to boundless space. Our time is limited, yet points to eternity. Time, though limited, is important for it was our time which was capable of receiving the Saviour who within his thirty-three years and within our flesh achieved the work of our salvation. Because it was for us that he, the eternal Word, assumed our flesh amid passing time, we live, as Gregory of Nyssa said, on the boundary between two worlds. Because he came to save us, this implies there is something in us worth saving, namely the image of God. Alas, that image is distorted by wrath, cowardice and greed. These could go along with intellectual pride and confidence in the power of our reason to restore the image and attain the knowledge of God. However, recognition of this dangerous pride and confidence is not an excuse for denouncing intelligence as affording no help on the way to God. Reason can help to turn wrath, cowardice and greed into courage, caution and love. Like the woman in the parable, we have to light a candle to find our lost inheritance. The light of reason can throw light on concealed things and help us to 'aspire to the realm above' (Col.3:1). As Gregory of Nyssa expressed it, 'we human beings have here within ourselves the cause of both light and darkness'. He held that the marks of the divine image are reason and freewill. Without the use of our freewill and free choice there could be no authentic salvation.¹²

How Jesus achieved our salvation is a part of the secrets of God which we cannot fully grasp but we can accept what he has done for us. As Paul said, Jesus and his gift of salvation are God's

¹¹ Ibid. 103, 218, 236.

¹² Ibid. 130-131.

‘inexpressible gift’ (2 Cor. 9:15). We note again the negative adjective; so wonderful is the gift that no words are adequate to describe it fully, but, wonderfully, it can be accepted and become the source of new life, a new moral obedience in this life and a hope for the life immortal hereafter.¹³

Macrina went so far as to say that without this hope there could be no morality beyond seeking the fleeting pleasure of the passing moment. She had to admit that many who did not share this hope lived lives of high moral integrity, but she held that a life lived in response to God’s gift had a special quality. All the Cappadocians held the Sermon on the Mount to be a moral imperative of the gospel in this life which was the stage on which we progressed to perfection’s sacred height and also on which we learned to live with and care for others, even ‘the myriads of Lazaruses at our door’. We, including rulers, are all of one blood and have mutual responsibilities and civic duties.¹⁴

The Cappadocians had a rather glamorised idea of the way these duties were carried out in Constantinople. Gregory of Nazianzus, who had to survive amid much unrest in the city, could still depict it as a city never polluted by Grecian temples and where Christian theology had triumphed over classical culture. However, as Pelikan says, the mystique of Athens remained, even in Constantinople. Christian theology, of which the Cappadocians were masters, was now clothed in Greek forms and terms. Basil said Christians needed all the travel supplies available for the heavenward journey, including classical authors. Gregory of Nazianzus said it was poor judgement to abhor a classical education.¹⁵ The Cappadocians were convinced that in using the resources of the Greek cultural heritage they were doing so in the service of the gospel set forth in the Scriptures. They believed they were illuminating its inner message and preserving it from error. As John Armstrong, the eighteenth-century Scottish poet, put it, ‘they taught truths as refined as ever Athens heard’.

¹³ Ibid. 282-288.

¹⁴ Ibid. 144-149.

¹⁵ Ibid. 175-177.

Finally, the prime interest of the Cappadocians was not theological debate or linguistic precision, important as these were. Their central concern was the worship of God and the regular life of praise, preaching and pastoral care. Basil and the two Gregorys all became bishops and were involved in the care of their people and in ensuring the regular round of worship in the churches. Basil often preached on the duty and privilege of individual and corporate prayer; he was also noted as an influential guide in shaping forms of worship. One of the orders of service still used in the Eastern Church is known as the Liturgy of St. Basil. Though this form has been much revised across the years, it is likely it still bears the imprint of the work of Basil.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Cappadocians made no apology for their deep concern for precision of language; in their view, it was worth the pain and the struggle to have words capable of expressing the glory and mercy of God and worthy to be used in his worship. Their words are still used to express the basic doctrines of the gospel, God the holy trinity and Jesus Christ, the revelation of God and the source of our salvation through his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice. Their sense of awe before Jesus Christ, the gift of God beyond all telling, has echoed through the ages. A fine example comes from Isaac Watts:

Join all the glorious names
of wisdom, love and power,
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore,
All are too mean to speak his worth,
Too mean to set my Saviour forth.

It is a privilege to submit these pages as a tribute to Professor Russell with whom I enjoyed a fine friendship in the Banbridge Presbytery over forty years ago and whose friendship I have renewed in recent years. He has been a fine witness to the Faith transmitted to us through the New Testament and through the

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Toal, M.F. ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, Vol. 2, 377-386.

Knox, **Christianity and Classical Culture**, *IBS* 18 October 1996

disciples of all times and places, not least the great group of Cappadocians.

R. Buick Knox

JEWISH MISSIONARY ACTIVITY UNDER REVIEW

Rev. D. P. Ker

Professor E.A. Russell is held in high esteem by those who have had the privilege of sitting at his feet. He has set standards both of thoroughness and graciousness which mark him out as teacher and mentor par excellence. Through his guidance many of us have been encouraged to journey further in the study of Christian origins within and alongside Judaism. This article, a small marker along the way of such a journey, is offered with appreciation and gratitude.

“At the time of Jesus’ appearance an unparalleled period of missionary activity was in progress in Israel”¹. Thus Joachim Jeremias summed up the received wisdom of a generation of scholars. It was assumed that the outreach of the early church, and in particular of Paul, could easily be paralleled with an aggressive campaign in at least parts of Judaism, and that this explained, at least to some extent, opposition such as Paul encountered in Corinth.²

Recently, however, this assumption has been severely challenged. In part the challenge comes from studies which seek to examine more precisely the manner in which Jewish and Christian communities defined themselves. But the concern to place current relationships between Jews and Christians into a clear historical context has spurred on the discussion.

A particularly emphatic questioning has come from Martin Goodman in his study *Mission and Conversion* (Oxford, 1994). In this paper I hope to outline Goodman’s position in contesting the evidence which has been offered for Jewish missionary activity in the first century C.E. and then to offer some assessment of his position.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Lying at the foundation of this discussion is Goodman’s wish to examine the assumption that “the positive desire to affect

¹ Jeremias, J.: *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*. (E.T. London 1958)

² See, for example, Georgi, D.: *The Opponents of Paul in II Corinthians* (E.T. London 1988)

outsiders" is "an integral part of every religion".³ Should we fail to offer such an critique we may be guilty of the unconscious Christianization of the study of ancient religions.

Some terms must therefore be defined. Three ideas considered by Goodman to be considerably less than a conscious desire in mission to win converts are:

(a) the dissemination of religious information without a desire to change the recipient's behaviour or status - best termed "information":

(b) a desire to change the behaviour of recipients by making them more moral or contented, without the auditor necessarily recognising such a change was part of the belief system espoused by the missionary - best termed "education":

(c) recognition of the power of a particular divinity without expecting the audience to devote themselves to his/her worship - best termed "apologetic".

How, then, are we to define proselytism? "Those who...believed that, as members of a defined group, they should approve of those within their number who might choose to encourage outsiders not only to change their way of life but also to be incorporated within their group."⁴

The critical reader may notice some problems emerging even at this stage. The term "defined group" can be problematic, even when applied to the early Christian Church, for we may see within many of the writings of the New Testament that early Christian communities faced considerable difficulties in defining themselves.

A further issue arises regarding the evidence admissible in our search. Goodman is restrictive, permitting only "...explicit or very strongly implied evidence of a universal mission to bring people perceived as outsiders into a particular community and to convert them to the views held by that community. Evidence that could, but need not, imply such proselytising will be examined but will in general be discounted. Nor will even explicit statements in the sources always be taken at face value."⁵

³ Goodman p.3

⁴ Goodman p.4

⁵ Goodman p.14

There is reason for such rigour, even though it is possible that terms of the search will preclude any positive results. Civic religion in the early Roman empire had an important social function, reinforcing the norms of human relations. Thus the implication of proselytising effort is not enough. The attitudes of later centuries, when the state's attitude to Christianity was very different, may not be used to inform our judgements.

BASIC ATTITUDES

We turn to survey the environment in which Christianity was born and grew. This comes to us in two parts.

A. The religious practice and thinking of the cults and philosophies of the pagan Roman Empire. Our questions, springing from our previous definitions, may be posed thus:

(i) Did the adherents of the variety of cults operating feel that those outside their cult needed educated or informed?

(ii) Did they feel that it was important to gain the benevolence of outsiders towards their god?

(iii) Did they feel themselves to be a defined group of worshippers into which all humans should be drawn?

Although Goodman senses that the answer to the third of his questions is "probably not" he recognises immediately that such a negative is difficult to prove, not least because of a lack of first-hand sources. For the most part we are dependent on passing references in secular literature and occasional inscriptional evidence.

Equally problematic in answering the question is the suggestion that, for the most part, pagans might adhere to one or more cults, but they didn't convert to any of them, in the sense of seeing themselves as belonging to a group whose boundaries were determined by cult membership.

There are exceptions. Both Mithraists and followers of the cult of Isis had a distinctive sense of belonging. Yet the distinction must be made between such a sense and the desire for new members. Evidence for the latter is slender.

What of cults which spread? We are offered two examples. In the first Livy (39. 8-19) tells of the growth of the cult of Dionysius through Italy in the second century BCE. Although his report records that it spread like wildfire "because of the delights of

wine and feasts"... "like a contagious disease" Livy makes no specific mention of the work of proselytising missionaries. Thus the spread of Dionysiac religion cannot of itself be considered good evidence for such proselytising activity.

The second example comes from the Satirist Lucian, who tells of how a certain Alexander sought to disseminate a cult of a "New Asclepius". He organised an energetic mission, but did not encourage his victims to join any defined group or adopt a new way of life. Thus these efforts cannot really be considered propaganda.⁶

The line between "religion" and "philosophy" can be a slender one. Thus we should take note of, in particular, the Pythagoreans and the Epicureans. Here we discover an enthusiasm to teach outsiders, but this mission was to educate rather than proselytise. The two most widely accepted philosophical schools of thought, Platonism and Stoicism, may well have been adopted, not through their desire for new adherents but simply because people sensed their notions to be true.

It may come as a surprise but, as Goodman sees it, the closest one gets to a proselytising mission is the Imperial Cult. Emperor worship was clearly encouraged, and those who partook of the Imperial Cult clearly signalled that they belonged to a defined community - the state itself. However, although there might be occasional hints as to Rome's destiny of universal government, membership of the cult was, of necessity, politically defined. Any part of the world where Rome did not hold power was also beyond the bounds of the cult, and there seems to have been no attempt by Romans to encourage those who were outside their political control to join their religious community.

Goodman's summary is blunt. "No pagan seriously dreamed of bringing all humankind to give worship in one body to one deity."⁷

B. Judaism before 100 C.E.

Activity only makes sense if we understand the attitudes on which it is founded. Thus we need first to consider Jewish attitudes

⁶ See further discussion in Jones, C.P.: *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass. 1986)

Goodman p.32

to paganism as we find them expressed Jewish literature, for only then may we interpret the evidence for what has been presumed to be a considerable proselytising mission within Judaism.

A major difficulty, however, is to find sufficient evidence on which to form judgements. "Judaism" is of itself a slippery term, and we need to avoid any tendency to assume that the opinions of one or two authors represent the whole, or indeed a majority, of Jewish thinking. The variety of Jewish attitude and approach in the Diaspora is helpfully outlined by John Barclay who defines behaviour in terms of High, Medium and Low levels of assimilation, while assessing attitude as Cultural Convergence or Cultural Antagonism.⁸

A further difficulty arises in that the three major contemporary sources which we have, Philo, Josephus and St. Paul, are each peculiar in some way, and have a personal agenda which prevents them from offering a broadly-based picture.

So how did Judaism view paganism? There is a variety of approach within the Hebrew scriptures. On the one hand we have Ezra's concern that Judaism should not be polluted by Gentile influence. On the other hand Job, set in a non-Jewish world, suggests that its hero is a Gentile who is applauded for avoiding idolatry and is acceptable within Judaism. Within the prophet Isaiah we have a strongly sarcastic critique of paganism, yet the acknowledgement that a pagan ruler can be God's instrument.

When we turn to the writings of Diaspora Judaism we should be cautious of making over-hasty judgements. Even passages which at first sight appear to offer a strong critique of paganism, such as Wisdom of Solomon chs. 13-15, may not be all that they seem. Since imagination plays its part in casting the author in the role of Solomon might not imagination equally be at work when we see the recipients in the role of pagans. At any rate Wisdom seems not to have been widely read in Judaism, being much more popular within the early Christian community.

Again the romance of Joseph and Aseneth could be considered as evidence of a particularly hostile attitude toward paganism. There is obvious distaste for Asenath's idolatry before her

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Barclay, J.M.G.: *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*. (Edinburgh 1995)

conversion, which might best be expressed through the constantly repeated demand for repentance. Over against this we should remember that this romance deals with the particularly sensitive issue of marriage between Jew and Gentile, and thus may not be the best example of Jewish attitudes to Gentiles as such.

If this is so it should, according to Goodman, force us to consider afresh the manner in which we interpret the variety of texts which are presumed to refer to widespread Jewish proselytism taking place at the same time as the rise of the Christian community. Judaism may well have seen that it had a role as religious mentor for the Gentile world, and that in the last Days Gentiles would acknowledge the Lord God. But, he suggests, this is very different from any impulse to draw non-Jews into Judaism at the present time.

ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE

We turn to presenting, and then critically examining, the evidence which has been traditionally offered in support of Jewish proselytism in the first century C.E. First and foremost we must acknowledge that proselytes existed. Although some questions, regarding how precisely they were viewed within Israel, remain unanswered there seems little doubt that they were a considerable community, and that they were to be welcomed.

In addition we may note those instances in which Jews insisted that Gentiles should convert. Most notable are the Idumeans and Ituraeans who, Josephus tells us, were forced to become Jews after their conquest during the Hasmonean period.⁹ The female members of the Herodians insisted that their Gentile intended marriage partners should become Jews before the marriage might take place.¹⁰ The presumption behind all of this is that, since Jews insisted on conversion when they had the power to enforce it, they sought to use persuasion when no other means was available.

Evidence comes from another source as we consider possible antagonism to proselytising efforts. Thus the expulsions of Jews

⁹ Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.257-258, 319

¹⁰ Josephus: *A.J.* 20.139, 145

from Rome both in 139 BCE and 19 CE have generally been understood as a punishment for seeking too many proselytes.¹¹

Three direct literary references should be added to the picture. First comes Horace's comment to a friend (*Satires* 1:4 142-143) "veluti te Iudaei cogemus in hanc concedere turbam", which is seen as a reference to proselytising activity. Second, *Philo (De Vita Mosis*, 2.44) expresses a hope that, through the translation of the Septuagint, "each nation might abandon its peculiar ways, and, bidding farewell to its ancestral customs, turn to our laws alone." The third reference is Matthew 23:15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, that you cross land and sea to make one proselyte..."

But does this collection of evidence in fact suggest a positive desire among Jews of the period to win converts. Goodman thinks not.

Taking the last reference first, Goodman suggests that the Matthaean reference to "Proselutos" does not necessarily refer to a convert from paganism to Judaism. It may also refer to a convert from within Judaism to a Pharisaic interpretation of Halakha. In the context of Matthew's Gospel this is a very plausible possibility. Goodman supports this understanding of "proselutos" by noting, first, that it is a very rare word in the literature of the period in question and that, although it was becoming the word for a gentile who had converted, it still allowed for some flexibility. Evidence for this may be found in the Septuagint's very occasional use of the word to refer to a resident alien (as in Lev. 19:10 and Ex. 22:20). The fact that its meaning was very clearly defined by the fourth century C.E as "...children of the Greeks...now...become Jews" lends further credence to the thought that at one stage its meaning was considerably vaguer.¹²

Should this be the case the Matthaean reference, which is the most critical one, can no longer be used as proof positive of Jewish proselytising activity.

The other evidence is equally questionable. Take, for instance, Horace's throw-away line in a poem which is really

¹¹ For a full discussion see Smallwood, E.M.: *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden 1976)

¹² Goodman pp.70 ff

concerned with encouraging other to write poetry also. His somewhat disparaging reference to "the Jews" may have nothing to do with proselytising and everything to do with the notorious ability of the Jewish crowd in Rome to get their own way by mass intimidation. Horace's use of the verb "cogere" - "to compel", seems a strong way to speak of what should be persuasive proselytising.

What about Philo? He may have written of his hope that "each nation might abandon its peculiar ways, and, bidding farewell to its ancestral customs, turn to our laws alone", but is this anything other than rhetorical exaggeration - an author carried away with enthusiasm for his subject, the Mosaic Laws? He may sense that the Septuagint translation should win the admiration of all Gentiles for the Jewish laws. The poor political fortunes of the Jews prevented that admiration taking place at the moment, but perhaps the day would come. This, however, was very far from commending immediate proselytising activity.

Having seen that our most direct evidence does not admit of simply one interpretation we may need to re-evaluate our whole approach. "It is unlikely that any of the residual arguments for a Jewish mission in the first century CE would have been proposed if such a mission had not already been presupposed."¹³

Let us consider the forced conversions of the Idumeans to Judaism on which, according to Josephus, the Hasmonaeans insisted. Goodman suggests that these were really a political gambit - if Rome could act in this way and thus gain respect then Judaism might be wise to do the same. At any rate these conversions might be considered to be taking place within the land of Israel. (Goodman recognises that it is a bit questionable to see Idumean territory as lying within Israel, but he suggests that it is at least possible.) Thus the theological principle lying behind them, if one were needed at all, was that the land must be kept pure, and so idolatry must be removed. Those living among the Jews must be circumcised.

If this was the rationale behind enforced conversions then it clearly applies only within Israel and not to the Diaspora. The other area of enforced conversion was marriage. It was widely insisted, not least by the Herodians, that conversion should take place before

marriage. But this in no way implies a particular concern to proselytise, since marriage is a special case.

Turning to a further area of supposed evidence for proselytising intentions, namely the large amount of Jewish literature produced in the Greek language, Goodman follows a line of argument which has often been expressed, most clearly by Victor Tcherikover,¹⁴ namely that this material was intended for Greek speaking Jews, not for outsiders. "It is, of course, possible that some of these works were read by Gentiles as well as Jews, and that this was the intention of their authors....but if this was the case it is hard to see what Gentiles were to make of such literature....When the writings urged specifically Jewish customs, such as the observance of the Sabbath, they tended to be pseudonymous: thus the fact that Orpheus was portrayed by a Jewish forger as approving of Jewish morality was likely to be comforting to a Jew who approved of Orpheus but was not likely to persuade a Gentile to become Jewish."¹⁵ All this is based on the supposition that any literature which was intended to persuade Gentiles to abandon their social customs and communities in order to become Jewish would have to be much more direct.

There remains the question of the expulsions of Jews from Rome in 139 BCE and 19 CE, allegedly for their proselytising activities. It is difficult to obtain much by way of good source material for the first expulsion. We learn about it from Valerius Maximus,(1.3,3) whose work survives only through two 5th. century Byzantine epitomators, and they relay his words in slightly different form. The crime is noted as "trying to transmit their sacred rites to the Romans"; private altars were therefore removed by the Roman authorities and they were expelled from the city. Goodman notes that this seems to be rather a strange crime. He doubts that, in the context of second century BCE Judaism any convert would have been encouraged to set up any altar of any kind. Rather two things may have been happening: first the Jews may have upset the authorities by simply bringing in a new cult without proper approval,

¹⁴ Tcherikover, V.A.: "Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered"
Eos 48 (1956) pp 169-193

¹⁵ Goodman p.80

while at the same time some Roman citizens, in admiration of Judaism, may have sought to set up private altars of their own - but this can hardly be construed as missionary activity by Judaism.

The later expulsion in 19 CE is recorded both by Tacitus and Josephus, but neither of them offer missionary activity as an explanation. The possibility of missionary activity is offered by Cassius Dio (in a fragment preserved by the seventh century Christian writer John of Antioch). Does this more likely reflect the situation in Dio's own day?

What of the general growth of the Jewish population which took place during this period? Goodman suggests that, had this been the result of a mass conversion, some writer would surely have recounted it with pride. Thus, while conversion may be a possible cause for such growth the more plausible reason may be the overpopulation of the home country, and Jewish opposition to abortion, infanticide and contraception - thus allowing the population to expand more quickly than that of its gentile neighbours.

It's important to note that Goodman recognises that Judaism DID have an interest in Gentile sympathisers during the first century. In this category he places the comment of Josephus that the Jews of Antioch had for many years been bringing into their cult practices many Greeks whom they had thus quite deliberately made 'in some way' a part of themselves.¹⁶ The intensity of such mission might vary from place to place and, Goodman suggests, the motive may have been political rather than theological - in order to win support from influential friends for their existence in a pagan environment.

One might be tempted to think that Josephus' comment serves to undermine much of Goodman's thesis. He argues rather that the very fact of such a partial mission, largely apologetic in form, has NEGATIVE implications for any concept of a universal proselytising mission. There is, for instance, no evidence that a pious sympathiser was expected to undergo circumcision and become Jewish - unlike the Christian expectation that Christian catechumens be baptised.

Later Judaism did proselytise, as did the Christian church. But "the missionary hero in search for converts to Judaism is a

¹⁶ Josephus: *Wars of the Jews* 7.45

phenomenon first approved by Jews well after the start of the Christian mission, not before it. There is no good reason to suppose that any Jew would have seen value in seeking apostle in the first century with an enthusiasm like that of the Christian apostles.”¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Goodman’s critique is important, and may not be ignored. He offers important caution against the danger of looking at non-Christian communities through Christian eyes and thus unconsciously Christianising their motives, not to mention filling in the considerable gaps in the evidence with Christian presuppositions. But there are surely some difficulties with his thesis:

1. His categories of mission are tightly drawn, and this very preciseness affects his results. If you are looking for something very specific in the ancient world, and will only accept as evidence that which unquestionably indicates it, then almost inevitably you will end up with “case not proven”. There is greater need to allow sufficiently both for the occasional nature of the sources to be examined and for the mixture of motive which one observes as part of any religious enterprise.

2. The case against Jewish proselytising activity depends considerably on offering a flexible interpretation for the word “Proselyte” in Matt. 23:15. Despite the attraction of reading it, within the context of Matthew 23, as a reference contained entirely within Judaism, we have no clear demonstration that it may be used in this way.

3. Josephus’ account of the behaviour of the Jewish community in Antioch may not point to a “Universal proselytising Mission”, but it would seem to be more significant than Goodman allows. If this kind of activity took place in any particular location it illustrates that there were at least some in the community who thought it desirable.

4. If we are thus allowed to read both Josephus and Matthew at face value then we may not need to see Cassius Dio’s reference to Jewish activity in Rome as being anachronistic.

5. It is hard to believe that the clear missionary activity of the early Christian communities emerged from the sort of vacuum which Goodman proposes. His own explanation for the start of Christian Mission is based partly on eschatological fervour, partly on the particular personality of Paul and partly on the disappointment of the early Christians over the delay of the Parousia, which resulted in their adopting an aggressive proselytising stance. While these factors may have played a part they prove less than satisfactory reasons for the missionary expansion of the church if such mission was heretofore an unknown phenomenon.

Despite Goodman, therefore, we may still think in terms of Jewish proselytising activity in the first century C.E. The next step on the journey may well be to discover whether converts to Judaism, or those on the edge of the Synagogue, were among the first to attach themselves to the new Christian communities, and what sort of converts they made.¹⁸

D.P.Ker.

¹⁸ An example of this discussion is introduced by Judith M. Lieu: "Do God-Fearers make Good Christians?" in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*. (Leiden 1994)

The Bible in Theology and Preaching, by Donald K. McKim, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. 250pp. £10.99

Donald K. McKim, Academic Dean and Professor of Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary, has the happy knack of being able to communicate difficult and even decidedly odd theological ideas to a wide audience without either distorting the material or losing his patience. It may be hoped that with this expansion and update of his earlier work, *What Christians believe about the Bible* (1985), he will succeed in stimulating discussion among ministers, students and laypeople.

He first introduces the hermeneutical approaches of classical and current Roman Catholicism, and of the Lutheran, Reformed and Anabaptist traditions. There follow twelve chapters on "theological positions," which are specified and characterised thus: Liberal theology : Scripture as experience; Fundamentalist theology : Scripture as proposition; Scholastic theology (by which is meant the scholastic Calvinism descending from B.B. Warfield, via J.G. Machen to Roger Nicole) : Scripture as doctrine; Neo-orthodox theology : Scripture as witness; Neo-evangelical theology (namely, that whose catalyst was H.J. Ockenga, and whose most prominent representative is Carl F.H. Henry) : Scripture as message; Existential theology : Scripture as living encounter; Process theology : Scripture as unfolding action; Narrative theology : Scripture as stories that shape; Latin American liberation theology : Scripture as liberation for the oppressed; Asian theology : Scripture as stories for freedom; and Feminist and womanist theology : Scripture as the mother of models. In an "afterword" he outlines the approaches of some of those who have "sliced the pie" in other ways - David H. Kelsey and Avery Dulles among them.

In addition to its descriptive usefulness, the book also functions as an anthology, for to each of the "positions" chapters is appended at least one sermon by an exponent of the approach under review. This further enhances the value of the text for group discussion or for first-year undergraduate courses. The notes provide students with many suggestions for further reading, and there is a full index.

The author allows exponents of the several approaches to display their wares but, self-effacingly, does not adjudicate upon

them. This is not a serious disadvantage given the present book's expository purpose. But since Professor McKim is so knowledgeable on these matters, and since he could not consistently endorse all of the views presented here for some of them are mutually exclusive, a further constructive work from his busy pen would receive as cordial a welcome as this one.

Alan P.F. Sell

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George Newlands: *God in Christian Perspective*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1994). Pp. 431.

It is the purpose of Professor Newlands in this latest of his publications to offer 'a modern restatement of the doctrine of God'. A 'restatement' is at once both less and more ambitious than the abandonment and replacement of the doctrine as some nowadays attempt. On the one hand, a restatement seeks to be faithful to the tradition to which the Church is heir without presuming to create *ex nihilo*, and on the other, the work of restatement attempts to address the contemporary world rather than merely to reflect it. Both aspects are the continuing responsibility of Christian theologians and both are obligations to which Professor Newlands commits himself in this book.

Newlands' approach to such a task is to trace the ramifications of the confession that God is love. Such a confession is, as Newlands makes clear, already a matter of faith but it is a foundational confession within which, Newlands hopes, may be gathered all who attempt to articulate a Christian perspective upon the doctrine of God. The concern to be attentive to an extremely diverse range of theological testimony is a pervasive feature of Newlands' work if not always brought to bear upon his discussion with sufficient attention to real differences among the various theologies.

At one level Newlands' approach is bound to be successful; one is unlikely to find objectors among Christian theologians to the claim that God is love. To begin with such a confession is safely to assume some common ground it would seem - at least at the terminological level. But objections of another kind might be

considered. On the one hand it might be asked whether beginning with the confession that God is love takes sufficiently seriously the widespread contemporary disinterest in the question of God. Can a modern restatement of the doctrine be content with an opening gambit which is likely to secure an audience only among the 'converted'? On the other hand, it might be asked whether such a beginning sufficiently safeguards Newlands' concern to provide a 'Christian' perspective on God. If it is this confession, rather than the confession that in Jesus Christ we find ourselves addressed by God, which shapes our theological programme might there not be at least the danger of straying from the particular character and definition which is given to the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ? In recognition of both concerns it might be the responsibility of Christian theologians to begin the task of restatement amidst the contemporary expressions of disinterest in and despair of theology but as one who has confidence in revelation.

It must, of course, be pointed out that Newlands is himself concerned to be attentive to the revelation of God in Christ but it is questionable whether his methodological proposals are sufficient unto that end. He asks in criticism of Eberhard Jungel for instance, how it is possible 'to see the manifestation of God in Jesus without any prior notion of what God may be like?' (p.26) but that seems to me to be less problematic than the proposal to form a notion of what God is like apart from God's self-disclosure. Such a counter is not simply tit for tat. At stake is nothing less than the freedom of God and the question of whether the formation of a Christian perspective on God is to be understood as a matter of human resourcefulness or rather as a matter of grace.

Methodological misgivings about Professor Newlands' project notwithstanding, the book does offer thoughtful discussion of the distinctively Christian affirmation of God's presence. While taking seriously the pervasive twentieth century impression of God's absence Newlands points us to particular signs of divine presence in suffering and resurrection and takes pains to dissuade us from an historical faith. This is an emphasis which, in a climate of religious anti-realism, is certainly to be welcomed.

Part two of the book turns from 'God in creation' to 'God in reconciliation' and only here does Newlands attempt to bring

Christology to bear upon the doctrine of God in any systematic way. His earlier claim in response to Aquinas and Barth that '(e)ach must make his or her own judgement of what constitutes the most adequate account of the place of Christology in the doctrine of God' (p.107) is true insofar as it places an emphasis on personal decision and commitment but the ambivalence of Newlands' recommendation can hardly be approved by those interested in articulating a 'Christian' perspective on God. One has cause to wonder whether in Newlands' project consideration of the person of Christ can properly be left so late.

The book concludes with discussions of pneumatology, ecclesiology and ethics. Again the methodological decisions worked out in the book raise the question of whether one ought to have allowed pneumatology to be an integral part of one's doctrine of God rather than to have one's understanding of the Holy Spirit shaped by a doctrine already formed. The Trinity apparently serves little more purpose in Newlands' theology than providing a way of organising his material. The consideration of ecclesiology and ethics is more appropriate at this point and thoughtful suggestions are made about the form and character of the Church's life. Some of the matters dealt with here are treated far too briefly and are hardly done justice on that account, but it is important to show, as Newlands does, that consideration of the doctrine of God cannot be isolated from God's promise and purpose for humanity and it is important too, in theological work, to try and articulate something of the character of that 'fullness of life' which is 'the fulfilment for which God has ordered his creation' (p.419).

A restatement of the doctrine of God, we have noted, which is faithful to the tradition and addresses the modern world is the continuing responsibility of Christian theologians. professor Newlands' book is to be approved insofar as it seeks to undertake that task. The reservations expressed above, however, leave this reader of *God in Christian Perspective* dissatisfied with the recommendations made in execution of that responsibility.

Murray A. Rae

Tertullian the Puritan and his Influence. By CAHAL B. DALY.

Dublin, Four Courts Press. 1993. Pp. 221. £30.

This book comprises a doctoral dissertation presented to the Faculty of Theology in Maynooth in 1945 by Cahal B. Daly, recently retired Irish Roman Catholic Primate. The style of writing betrays the dissertation origin with 658 footnotes covering 200 pages of text. While acknowledging that much research has been done on Tertullian in the intervening half century, Cardinal Daly writes, 'I am convinced that the central thrust of my 1945 research is valid and am bold enough to believe that it has been neither disqualified nor superseded by later studies' (Preface).

It is well documented that Tertullian changed his view on ecclesiastical penance. As a Catholic, writing *De poenitentia*, he enthused on the worth and efficacy of penance. No sin was irremissible. Later, as a puritan, Tertullian wrote *De pudicitia* in which he distinguished between lesser and graver sins, the latter being sins against God for which the Church did not possess the power to pronounce absolution. The key question for the historian is, Was this puritanism of Tertullian a protest against what he saw as shrinking standards and an appeal for a return to the 'former ways', or was he an innovator, attempting to establish new and hitherto unknown strict standards? In short, was the tide coming in or going out?

It is Daly's contention that the puritanism of Tertullian was an innovation. To state otherwise, he argues, is to follow the mistake of 'Liberal Protestant theologians', notably Adolf von Harnack. This is not to say that Tertullian did not influence Cyprian, plainly he did but to a limited degree. 'Cyprian borrowed from Tertullian's theology much that was narrow, exclusive and rigorist; yet rejected and opposed what was essentially puritan' (page 17). In other words, whereas Cyprian accepted and adopted Tertullian's rigorous views on the non-validity of heretical sacraments, he rejected Tertullian's restrictive and puritan concept of penance for sinners within the Church.

In adopting the rigorism of Tertullian Daly acknowledges the 'serious errors' in Cyprian's resultant sacramental theology and advances possible explanations in that Cyprian and his colleagues wrote 'in the heat of controversy' and also, 'they never entertained

the possibility of heretics being in good faith' (page 31). It was to fall to Augustine, in his controversy with the Donatists, to 'correct Cyprian'.

Daly asserts that Cyprian was right to reject the puritanism of Tertullian. He argues that the penitential teaching of Cyprian was always consistent with the earliest African tradition that penance can effect reconciliation of all sins. Cyprian's apparent hesitancy in the wake of the Decian persecution is presented not as a complaint at the principle of the reconciliation of the lapsed but rather a complaint that proper procedures and evidence of repentance and penance were being ignored. 'No innovation in the Catholic attitude towards sin was occasioned by the Decian persecution. The Church of Carthage merely continued in the way of traditional practice and traditional teaching' (page 161).

Although Daly's interpretation is not new, he has succeeded in setting out his case with clarity and enthusiasm. His strongest element is perhaps his meticulous notes which tie us firmly to the original sources. Whether as innovator or traditionalist, Tertullian was unquestionably a major influence on succeeding African theologians, both Catholic and puritan.

Laurence S. Kirkpatrick.

D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew. Paul and the Politics of Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Of the making of books about the apostle Paul there is no end. This book, however, can claim a certain distinctiveness in that it is a book written about Paul the Jew by a Jewish scholar who is an expert in rabbinical studies. He says that he wants to reclaim Paul as 'an important Jewish thinker. On my reading of the Pauline corpus, Paul lived and died convinced that he was a Jew living out Judaism. He represent then, one option which Judaism could take in the first century. Paul represents a challenge to Jews in the first century, and I will argue that he presents a challenge to Jews now as well.'

He goes on to ask in what ways his critique is important and valid for Jews today and indeed in what ways the questions that Paul raises about culture are important and valid for everyone today.

Further I want to inquire into the limitations, inadequacies, contradictions, and disastrous effects of some of the Pauline solutions to those problems. Finally I wish to interrogate our situation and ask whether we have better solutions to the cultural, social problems raised by the Pauline corpus.'

The challenge to contemporary Jews he deals with mainly in the last chapter, the rest of the book is concerned with understanding and critiquing the option which Paul chose in the first century. This is essentially, therefore, an inner Jewish debate, but Professor Boyarin, by publishing this book, has allowed Christians to, as it were, look over his shoulder and profit from the discussion.

This is a very dense book which raises many issues, e.g. Concerning feminism and post-modernism which are pertinent and relevant, but which cannot be dealt with in such a short review. Rather we will concentrate on the main issue which he deals with, Paul's critique of Judaism.

In the light of the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul', Boyarin argues, and most New Testament scholars would agree with him, that we can no longer glibly say that Paul was attacking first century Judaism because of its commitment to the idea of works righteousness ..i.e. the idea that they had to earn their salvation by our good works. In this view, this lead to two dire, but contradictory results; firstly people felt a sense of inadequacy and therefore despair (who could earn his or her salvation) or else they deluded themselves that they were able to achieve perfection, resulting in self righteousness and boasting before man and God. Secondly it lead to an arid religion devoid of spiritual feeling, a purely outward obedience to laws imposed externally. Obviously such a view could and did very quickly lead to a contemptuous attitude towards Judaism. It probably is no coincidence that this view of Judaism as attacking Judaism as an inferior, mechanistic, commercialised religion exactly paralleled portrayals of the Jewish people current in anti Semitic Europe. It is a view of first century Judaism which is not found in Jewish texts of around that time and certainly not that found in the Jewish Bible. A Jew would not have thought he could have earned his salvation, rather his doctrine of Salvation would have been based on the principle of what Sanders calls covenantal nomism. Also it is clear from the Jewish Bible and intertestamental

literature that there is a profound spirituality in first century Judaism and that, for example, prayer played a very important part in the everyday lives of Jews.

Boyarin then asks, what did Paul find lacking or wrong in the Judaism of his day. Following an idea from Dunn he argues that it was their use of the law as a boundary marker which Paul found unacceptable. As a Hellenist as well as a Jew, he would have been taught to stress the universal, the univocity of the world and to have found the particularity of Jewish claims to be a problem.

Boyarin then goes on to assess the value of Paul's approach and that of the first century Jews which he was attacking. On the one hand, the Christian universalism propounded by Paul obviously leads to concern for others, a mission to the whole world, but it can also lead to coercive force; to the killing of peoples bodies to save their souls; to the destruction of cultures to make them conform to Western so-called universal standards. The history of the spread of Christianity is blighted by the often violent absorption of cultural specificities into the dominant Christian one. The Pauline call to be 'imitators of me as I am of Christ', Boyarin sees as a particularly potent weapon in promoting cultural dominance and the destruction of weaker subordinate and different cultures. He of course sees the very climax of this in the Holocaust and the attitudes which lead up to it.

On the other hand, the particularism and specificity which Paul was attacking can lead to a people who do not have a will to power and who therefore are free from the desire to spread their culture by force if need be. They are content to defend their own culture against the cultural dominance of other world views. But, he points out, it can also lead to a egotistical, cynical egotism. He suggests that this particularism which can have such a positive role spills over into a very negative role when the group leaves what he calls a subaltern status and achieves dominant status. His closing chapter includes a discussion on the modern State of Israel in the light of his previous discussion.

To say that this is a stimulating book is to understate its impact. While in many places its language could have been clearer and less clichéd it represents an inner Jewish debate that Gentiles will find profit in listening to.

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